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The boys who had undergone the vocational training program in Mercer County were followed up. Lack of reading ability at grade level caused most dropouts. A program of practical job preparation on the basis of interest was provided, and the plan was quite successful. A factor which led to some unemployment after training was that some of the boys were not yet eighteen and therefore not old enough to work. Many did not receive home encouragement after training, and some did not seek employment.

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Mercer Co.
W. Va.
Mulligan

THE BOLD NEW VENTURE PLUS TWO YEARS

The real question, was the Mercer County School Dropout Pilot Training Program successful? It was asked in this manner: Where are the boys who took part in the Bold New Venture and what are they doing now? These were the questions asked of me time and time again, following presentations of the training program, during the past two years.

I wanted the answer and yet I was a little afraid of what it might be, and there was no way of finding the answer without going back to the homes.

So on June 11, 1964, I made the first home visit. To find out where the boys were who, two years ago, completed twelve weeks of training in Auto Mechanics, Building Trades, Electronics or Welding, and what they were doing.

This first visit could have scared me out of any further delving into the record of what has happened to the boys, and I could have continued to say the Bold New Venture was successful, that 114 of the 117 boys completed the training and received certificates in one of the four areas of training, that 12 boys returned to regular school, that 14 found jobs, that 9 entered military service, and the remainder, 79, were not of age to enter the world of work or to get into military service. That, their academic background (reading ability about 4.5), made it impossible for them to return to regular school and expect to be successful. We could have continued to answer the questions of where the boys are and what they are doing by saying there were no provisions in the training plan to follow up. That the 12 weeks ended and the boys went their several ways. These answers were not satisfactory and most of all, they did not satisfy me.

February 8, 1962, marked the beginning of the "Bold New Venture". It was on this date that House Bill No. 72 was enacted into law by the State of West Virginia, giving authority and direction for a JOB PREPARATION PROGRAM FOR SCHOOL DROPOUTS. The passage of this bill cleared the way for an experiment or pilot study into one of the major problems that confronts our society. The program was financed by the State, in cooperation with Mercer County, the location selected for the experiment.

Justification for the program was based on the following described needs and purposes:

1. To lessen school dropouts by finding the "why" of their leaving school, that remedial measures might be formulated.

2. To provide a planned program of practical job preparation on the basis of interest, and aptitude and ability, for those who drop out before completing high school.

3. To make participation in such a program compulsory for all male youth sixteen and seventeen years of age with the view of later extending it to include female dropouts falling in the same age bracket.

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Back in February of 1962 the general thought seemed to be that other programs of a similar nature, perhaps on a broader scale, would follow, and the first program was to point the way. Section 4 of the Bill said as much: "In order to determine the practicability, effectiveness, and cost of the job preparation program for school dropouts, there shall be established an experimental pilot program in a selected county for the summer months of one thousand nine hundred sixty-two."

Although the training program was successful in its holding power, job training, cost factor, and in finding out why students leave school before graduation, and it was considered very successful by the communities and by the parents of the trainees, the recommendation was not to continue with the program, for the following reasons:

1. The pilot program furnished the answers to the "WHY" boys and girls leave school before graduation, and it was thought that additional programs would not give different answers.

2. The age factor was a stumbling block. The boys were sixteen years and six months of age (average) when the program started and sixteen years and nine months of age (average) when the program ended, not old enough to enter the world of work, thus, we found them waiting and we left them waiting.

3. And, finally, it was the thinking of those who worked in the program that the pilot study provided direction for preventive school dropout measures within the regular school and that similar training programs should be part of the regular school and similar training programs should be conducted in each county or area for those who are <u>now</u> out of school and unemployed, (who cannot be persuaded to return to regular school), and for those who will drop out before adequate school dropout preventive measures are effective. These special training programs should be of such length and inclusive (Basic Education) to adequately prepare the trainees for the world of work. (Three months is too short--and trainees should not be expected to enter the world of work before age 18).

One of the major conclusions to be drawn from the experimental education program in Mercer County is that the dropouts, for the most part, are worthy of their right to be educated in public schools. They have the right to an education as well as the average student in high school, and their enthusiasm and desire is equal to their friends attending regular classes. Admittedly, the training for which they have this motivation is a different type generally, but nevertheless, with potentially the same effect.

What made these boys so different from the rest that they chose to quit school? They had met with the single most frustrating experience a youth can encounter: failure in school. Our society, teachers included, had turned them away, branding them as quitters and no goods. What caused these to be quitters? A combination of many things, but for most, it was their inability to read in the assigned grade.

Not everyone in the world was meant to study from books. We have failed to offer many youths a subject of study in which they are able to become interested and in which they can find a vocation. Interest is so much more important than subject matter. Give the boy something he likes and he will learn the elements important in a good life. This was what the Bold new Venture tried to give each boy and in the main was successful.

What did we find during this first visit? A family who blamed me for not providing Johnny with a job near his home. The father, an alcoholic old man at 42, who had not worked at anything for 3 years, and perhaps never really worked and provided for his family, continued to "jabber" about me getting him a job, about the Doctor not signing papers for him to work, about me helping to get him a job and the Doctor not know anything about it. The mother, holding a grandchild on her lap and two others standing at her side, saying very little, but I am sure thinking a lot, and I am equally sure she was not blaming me for Johnny's plight. To complete the picture, a 17 year old son, who dropped out of school at 16, was pleading with his mother to read a letter for him.

Now, back to Johnny. Johnny entered the Auto Mechanics Class in June of 62. His mother was pleased that he could have this second opportunity and she said as much through several letters and home visits during the training. His attendance was near perfect, his ability to get along with the members of the class and the instructor, and his progress in the training area was all that one could desire. All and all, Johnny was ready to enter the world of work. If the job had been available locally, everything would have been fine, but this was not the case. The problem--lack of motivation at home--desire of the family to keep Johnny at home--Then, Johnny got married shortly after the training program was over, then one child and then another--So, part-time jobs, hit and miss meals, and the other hardships that accompany this total situation. One month ago, Johnny took his wife and two babies with him to Baltimore to look for work. He planned to live with relatives for a few days until he could locate a job and a place to live---Johnny has the ability and he is willing to work. He has made the first real move. Now, the Bold New Venture will begin to pay dividends for Johnny. What does this story tell? That training alone is not enough--Motivation to move out and get a job is necessary---Taking the scare of the big city into consideration.

The foundation of The Bold New Venture was belief, faith, hope, and hard work, and that belief was at work when I left Johnny's home, a belief that Johnny would find a job in the big city and a belief that his automotive training would make it possible for him to be successful. It was with the faith that Johnny's mother and even his father were appreciative of the training that Johnny had received, and with the hope of finding a better report at the next home that motivated me to be on my way. The next report was better. Not all of the boys were moving in the stream of society as we might desire, (some were just turning 18 and some were loafing around town). However, the same offer of thanks for a job well done was received from parents, neighbors, community leaders, and from the boys we were able to contact personally.

I believe every boy who took part in the training program is a better person because of the experience. I believe attitudes were changed, for the better. All indications, after two years, point to the success of the Pilot Program of 1962.

Statistics two years after:

49	boys were employed
29	boys could not be located--had moved away--left no word, perhaps employed
16	boys were in the armed services
16	boys were at home, doing nothing, or working at odd jobs
3	boys graduated from high school and were working
1	boy deceased
114	

Finally, I was present for the graduation exercises at the Oakvale High School

this spring to see one of the boys receive his high school certificate, and a special award for outstanding work at the Vocational School, a closing scene for The Bold New Venture.